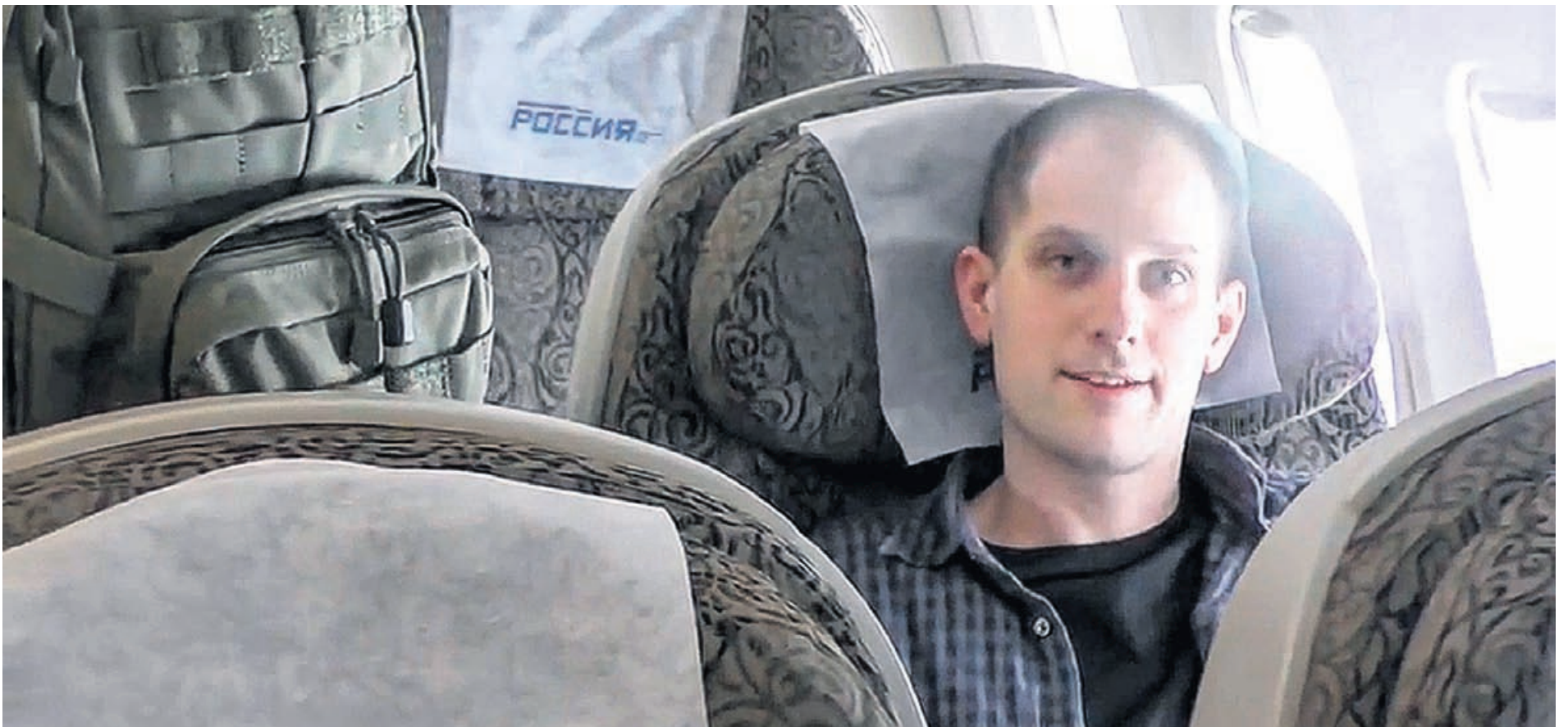




U.S. and Russia complete biggest prisoner swap in post-Soviet history, freeing Gershkovich and Whelan



In this image made from video provided by Russian Federal Security Service via RTR on Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024, Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich sits inside an airplane at an airport outside Moscow, Russia.

Associated Press
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U.S. and Russia complete biggest prisoner swap in post-Soviet history, freeing Gershkovich and Whelan

From Front

By **ERIC TUCKER, DASHA LIT-VINOVA and MATTHEW LEE**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and Russia completed their biggest prisoner swap in post-Soviet history on Thursday, with Moscow releasing journalist Evan Gershkovich and fellow American Paul Whelan, along with dissidents including Vladimir Kara-Murza, in a multinational deal that set two dozen people free.

The trade unfolded despite relations between Washington and Moscow being at their lowest point since the Cold War after Russian President Vladimir Putin's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Negotiators in backchannel talks at one point explored an exchange involving Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny but after his death in February ultimately stitched together a seven-nation, 24-person deal that required significant concessions from European allies, including the release of a Russian assassin, and secured freedom for a cluster of journalists, suspected spies, political prisoners and others.

President Joe Biden trumpeted the exchange, by far the biggest in a series of swaps with Russia, as a diplomatic feat while welcoming families of the returning Americans to the White House. But the deal, like others before it, reflected an innate imbalance: The U.S. and allies gave up Russians charged or convicted of serious crimes in exchange for Russia releasing journalists, dissidents and others imprisoned by the country's highly politicized legal system on charges seen by the West as trumped-up. "Deals like this one come with tough calls," Biden said but added: "There's nothing that matters more to me than protecting Americans at home and abroad."

Under the deal, Russia released Gershkovich, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal who was jailed in 2023 and convicted in July of espionage charges that he and the U.S. government vehemently denied.



In this image made from video provided by Russian Federal Security Service via RTR on Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024, Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich sits inside an airplane at an airport outside Moscow, Russia.

Associated Press

The paper's editor-in-chief, Emma Tucker, called it a "joyous day." "While we waited for this momentous day, we were determined to be as loud as we could be on Evan's behalf. We are so grateful for all the voices that were raised when he was silent. We can finally say, in unison, 'Welcome home, Evan,'" she wrote.

Also released was Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive jailed since 2018, also on espionage charges he and Washington have denied; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, a dual U.S.-Russian citizen convicted in July of spreading false information about the Russian military, accusations her family and employer have rejected.

The dissidents released included Kara-Murza, a Kremlin critic and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer serving 25 years on charges of treason widely seen as politically motivated, and multiple associates of Navalny. Other freed Kremlin critics included Oleg Orlov, a veteran human rights campaigner convicted of discrediting the Russian military, and Ilya Yashin, a former member of a Moscow municipal council who'd been imprisoned for criticizing the war in Ukraine.

The Russian side got Vadim

Krasikov, who was convicted in Germany in 2021 and sentenced to life in prison for killing a former Chechen rebel in a Berlin park two years earlier, apparently on the orders of Moscow's security services. Throughout the course of negotiations, Moscow had been persistent in pressing for his release, with Putin himself raising it.

At the time of Navalny's death, officials were discussing a possible exchange involving Krasikov. But with that possibility erased, senior U.S. officials, including national security adviser Jake Sullivan, made a fresh push to encourage Germany to release Krasikov. In the end, a handful of the prisoners Russia released were either German nationals or dual German-Russian nationals. Russia also received two alleged sleeper agents who were jailed in Slovenia, as well as three men charged by federal authorities in the U.S., including Roman Seleznev, a convicted computer hacker and the son of a Russian lawmaker, and Vadim Konoshchenok, a suspected Russian intelligence operative accused of providing American-made electronics and ammunition to the Russian military. Norway returned an academic arrested on suspicions of being a Russian spy, and Po-

land also sent back a man it detained on espionage charges. "Today is a powerful example of why it's vital to have friends in this world," Biden said while joined by the families.

All told, seven nations participated in the deal, which was executed in Ankara in the final months of his administration and during the course of a presidential race upended by his decision not to seek reelection.

Biden placed securing the release of Americans held wrongfully overseas at the top of his foreign policy agenda for the six months before he leaves office. In an Oval Office address discussing his decision to drop his bid for a second term, Biden said, "We're also working around the clock to bring home Americans being unjustly detained all around the world."

At one point Thursday, he grabbed the hand of Whelan's sister, Elizabeth, and said she'd practically been living at the White House as they tried to free Paul. He then motioned for Kurmasheva's daughter Miriam to come closer and took her hand, telling the room it was her 13th birthday, and then asked everyone to sing Happy Birthday with him. She wiped tears from her eyes. His administration has now

brought home more than 70 Americans detained in other countries, deals that have required the U.S. in the past to give up a broad array of convicted criminals, including for drug and weapons offenses. The U.S. government's top hostage negotiator, Roger Carstens, has defended the swaps against criticism that they incentivize future hostage-taking, saying the number of wrongfully detained Americans has actually gone down.

"We know the U.S. government is keenly aware, as are we, that the only way to prevent a quickening cycle of arresting innocent people as pawns in cynical geopolitical games is to remove the incentive for Russia and other nations that pursue the same detestable practice," Tucker, the Journal's editor, wrote, saying there needed to be a dynamic change.

"But for now," she added, "we are celebrating the return of Evan."

Thursday's swap of 24 prisoners surpassed a deal involving 14 people that was struck in 2010. In that exchange, Washington freed 10 Russians living in the U.S. as sleepers, while Moscow deported four Russians, including Sergei Skripal, a double agent working with British intelligence. He and his daughter in 2018 were nearly killed in Britain by nerve agent poisoning blamed on Russian agents. Speculation had mounted for weeks that a swap was near because of a confluence of unusual developments, including a startlingly quick trial and conviction for Gershkovich, which Washington regarded as a sham. He was sentenced to 16 years in a maximum-security prison. In a trial that concluded in two days in secrecy in the same week as Gershkovich's, Kurmasheva was convicted on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military that her family, employer and U.S. officials rejected. Also in recent days, several other figures imprisoned in Russia for speaking out against the war in Ukraine or over their work with Navalny were moved from prison to unknown locations. □

U.S. arrests at Mexico border are expected to drop 30% in July to a new low for Biden's presidency

By ELLIOT SPAGAT

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Arrests of migrants for illegally crossing the border to the United States from Mexico plummeted about 30% in July to a new low for Joe Biden's presidency, U.S. authorities said, raising prospects that a temporary ban on asylum may be lifted soon.

The U.S. Border Patrol continued making arrests Wednesday, the last day of July. But the monthly tally was expected to be around 57,000 when all are tallied, down from 83,536 arrests in June, the previous low mark of Biden's presidency, according to two U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because figures had not been released publicly. It would be the lowest monthly tally since 54,771 arrests in September 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic slowed movement across borders in many countries, including to the United States.

Even before Biden's Democratic administration invoked powers to suspend asylum on June 5, border arrests had fallen by about



President Joe Biden, center, looks over the southern border, Feb. 29, 2024, in Brownsville, Texas. Walking with Biden are from l-r., Peter Flores, Deputy Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Jason Owens, Chief, U.S. Border Patrol and Gloria Chavez, Sector Chief, U.S. Border Patrol.

half from a record-high of 250,000 in December amid increased Mexican enforcement. Since June 5, arrests have fallen by half again, helping the White House fend off attacks by former President Donald Trump and other Republicans that Democrats, including Vice President Kamala Harris, have allowed the border to spiral out of

control.

A volley of ads launched Tuesday underscores the prominence of immigration as a campaign issue in November's election.

The Trump campaign launched its first television ad of the general election cycle, dubbing Harris the "border czar" for an early assignment as vice president to address root causes

of immigration in Central America and blaming her for a surge in illegal crossings under Biden's watch. After displaying headlines about crime and drugs, the video brands Harris as "Failed. Weak. Dangerously liberal."

A Harris ad, posted online, highlights Trump's opposition to a failed border bill earlier this year that would

have, among many other provisions, increased funding for Border Patrol agents and fentanyl detection. "There's two choices in this election: the one who will fix our broken immigration system and the one who is trying to stop her," the narrator says.

Neither ad mentions the drop in border arrests this year, but the latest declines may play in Harris' favor as many Republicans attack the Biden administration's new asylum restrictions as too little, too late.

The asylum halt would end if daily arrests drop below 1,500 over a seven-day average, a scenario that Customs and Border Protection officials are preparing for with arrests now hovering around 1,600 to 1,700 a day. The halt would be reinstated if arrests reach a seven-day daily average of 2,500, a threshold of "emergency border circumstances" that was immediately met when the restrictions took effect in June. Immigrant advocacy groups are challenging the asylum measures in court.

Under the halt, U.S. authorities deny a chance at asylum to anyone who crosses the border illegally. □

Associated Press

Obama and Bush join effort to mark America's 250th anniversary in a time of political polarization

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO

Associated Press

Former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush will join an effort to commemorate America's 250th anniversary in 2026, highlighting the initiative's attempts to build bipartisan momentum in an era of extreme political polarization. The former presidents and first ladies Michelle Obama and Laura Bush will serve as honorary national co-chairs of America250, the organization created by Congress in 2016 to oversee the celebration of the the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The commission's leaders

hope bringing together the two recent Democratic and Republican presidents will serve as an example of bipartisan cooperation in a country where political agreements seem rare and concerns are heightened over the potential for violence, especially heading toward a divisive presidential election.

Rosie Rios, a former U.S. treasurer who heads America250, emphasized that the commission organizing the celebration "has representation across all aisles." "This is a grassroots effort that all Americans feel like they can be a part of from Guam to Alaska, Fairbanks to Philadelphia, and ev-

erything in between," Rios said. "This is about celebrating and commemorating that we're the oldest democracy in the world."

The multiyear semiquincentennial celebration will include events in all 50 states and six U.S. territories. It formally launched July 4, 2023, during an MLB game between the Milwaukee Brewers and the Chicago Cubs at American Family Field in Milwaukee.

It also will include a service project called America Gives, an effort to compile oral histories of Americans and a nationwide scholastic contest in which students will reflect on what America means to them.

"This milestone is an opportunity to reflect on our history and recommit to

our country's founding values," the Bushes said in a statement. □



The White House is lit with the colors of the American flag to support team USA competing in the Paris Olympics, on Monday, July 29, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

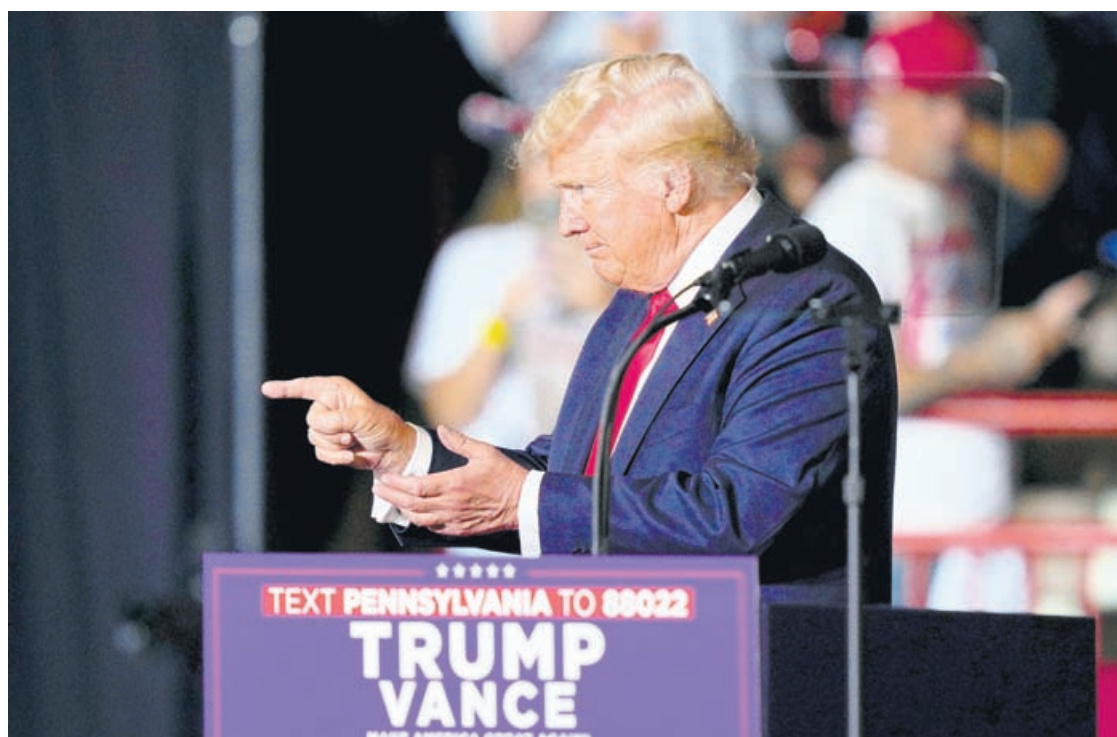
Donald Trump's gag order remains in effect after hush money conviction, New York appeals court rules

By **MICHAEL R. SISAK**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two months after his felony conviction, Donald Trump still isn't allowed to say everything he wants about his historic hush money criminal case. After a New York appeals court upheld his gag order on Thursday, he won't be for a while.

The state's mid-level appellate court denied the Republican former president and current nominee's latest bid to lift the restrictions, swatting away a last-minute argument that he's being unfairly muzzled while Vice President Kamala Harris, his likely Democratic opponent, pits herself as an ex-prosecutor taking on a "convicted felon."

A five-judge panel ruled that trial Judge Juan M. Merchan was correct in keeping parts of the gag order until Trump is sentenced because the case is still pending and his conviction doesn't constitute a change in circumstances that would warrant lifting it. "The fair administration of justice necessarily includes sentencing," the judges wrote. The gag order bars Trump from speaking out about members of the prosecution team, court staffers or their families, including Merchan's daughter, a Democratic political consultant who has been the target of Trump's



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump speaking during a campaign rally in Harrisburg, Pa., Wednesday, July 31, 2024.

Associated Press

wrath in the past. In June, Merchan lifted a ban on Trump publicly commenting about witnesses and jurors in the case, and he has always been free to speak directly about the judge and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, an elected Democrat whose office prosecuted the case. Trump is scheduled to be sentenced on Sept. 18, but the case and the gag order could be terminated before that if Merchan grants a defense request to throw out his conviction in light of the Supreme Court's presiden-

tial immunity ruling. He said he plans to rule on Sept. 6. Trump lawyer Todd Blanche and a spokesperson for the Manhattan district attorney's office declined to comment on Thursday's ruling. The ruling came a day after Blanche tried to file papers asking the appeals court to immediately lift the gag order. With its decision imminent, the court rejected the filing, which had called the restrictions an "unconstitutional, election-interfering" muzzle on Trump's free speech while he seeks to

return to the White House. In a copy of the prospective filing provided to The Associated Press, Blanche wrote that Harris' recent entry into the presidential race had given the matter new urgency and that "it is unconscionable that Harris can speak freely about this case, but President Trump cannot." The defense also revived complaints that Merchan has a "glaring conflict of interest" because his daughter, Loren, worked for Harris' 2020 presidential campaign and that one of the prosecutors,

Matthew Colangelo, was biased because he was a Justice Department official under President Joe Biden, a Democrat. Trump is unable to air those grievances himself because of the gag order. Trump's lawyers have made several efforts to have the gag order lifted. Their latest fight landed in the state's intermediate appeals court the Appellate Division, one rung up from Merchan's trial court level after they struck out with the state's top court. The Court of Appeals last month declined to hear Donald Trump's gag order challenge, finding it did not raise "substantial" constitutional issues that would warrant immediate intervention. Merchan imposed the gag order in March, restricting Trump from commenting about witnesses, jurors and others connected to the case, after prosecutors raised concerns about his habit of attacking people involved in his legal matters. The judge soon expanded it to prohibit comments about his own family after Trump lashed out on social media at the judge's daughter and made false claims about her. During the trial, the judge held Trump in contempt of court and fined him \$10,000 for violations, and he threatened to jail him if he did it again. □

Emergency fuel waiver issued for four Midwest states to alleviate soaring gas prices after storms



A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sign is seen outside the Andrew W. Breidenbach Environmental Research Center, Feb. 17, 2023, in Cincinnati.

Associated Press

Associated Press

The Environmental Protection Agency is issuing an emergency fuel waiver to help alleviate gasoline shortages in four Midwest states after the shutdown of an refinery in Illinois. Exxon Mobil shut down its refinery in Joliet, Illinois, last month after a power outage when tornadoes and severe storms swept through the region. Power has been restored, but it can take weeks to restart a facility like the Exxon Mobil refinery about 40 miles outside of Chicago, which can produce about 9 million gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel per day.

In addition to Illinois, the waiver was approved by the EPA for Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan.

Federal rules mandate the sale of low Reid Vapor Pressure gasoline during the summer months because a higher RVP evaporates more easily and can add to ozone pollution and smog. That is what is being waived temporarily, along with reformulated gasoline requirements for the four states. Reformulated gasoline is blended to burn more cleanly than conventional gasoline and to reduce pollutants in the air.

The waiver will continue through Aug. 20.

Gas prices in the four states spiked higher after the storms and all have gasoline that costs more than \$3.45 a gallon, according to AAA. In Illinois, it's approximately \$4 a gallon, which is currently among the highest in the country. Gas prices in California and Washington are over \$4 a gallon, where higher gas prices are more typical. □

Hezbollah leader says war with Israel has entered 'new phase' after killings of top militant figures

By **ABBY SEWELL** and **KAREEM CHEHAYEB**
Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hezbollah's leader warned Thursday that the conflict with Israel has entered a "new phase," as he addressed mourners at the funeral of a commander from the group who was killed by an Israeli airstrike this week in Beirut.

Meanwhile in Tehran, Iran's supreme leader prayed over the body of Hamas' political leader, who was killed in a presumed Israeli assassination.

The back-to-back killings have increased fears of an escalation into a wider war, leaving the region waiting to see how Iran and ally Hezbollah will respond. Iran has vowed retaliation against Israel for the strike that killed Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday in the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Israel has not claimed responsibility for Haniyeh's assassination, but comments by Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari stopped short of an outright denial.

"There was no additional airstrike, not a missile and not an Israeli drone, in the entire Middle East that night," he said Thursday, fueling speculation that Israel could have used other means to kill Haniyeh.

Israel did confirm it carried out the strike Tuesday in Beirut that killed Hezbollah commander Fouad Shukur, along with an Iranian military adviser and at least five civilians. Israel said Shukur was behind a rocket attack days earlier that hit a soccer field in the Israeli-held Golan Heights, killing 12 children. Hezbollah denied being behind that strike, a denial that Nasrallah reiterated.

In a speech via video link to mourners gathered with Shukur's coffin at an auditorium in a Beirut suburb, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said, "We ... have entered a new phase that is different from the previous period."

"Do they expect that Hajj

Ismail Haniyeh will be killed in Iran and Iran will remain silent?" he said of the Israel-

war, but outside diplomacy reined in the two sides. Hezbollah faces strong pres-

Shams in the Golan.

"We have the courage to take responsibility for where

and moved on the street toward Azadi Square in Tehran and people throwing flowers at it.

Haniyeh's remains are to be transferred to Qatar for burial Friday.

Haniyeh came to Tehran to attend the inauguration of Pezeshkian. Associated Press photos showed the Hamas leader seated alongside leaders from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group and Hezbollah, and Iranian media showed him and Pezeshkian hugging. Haniyeh had met earlier with Khamenei. Hours later, he was killed in a strike that hit a residence Haniyeh uses in Tehran. Iranian authorities said the attack is under investigation but haven't provided details.

Israel had pledged to kill Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza. On Thursday, Israel said it had confirmed that the head of Hamas' military wing, Mohammed Deif, was killed in a July 13 airstrike in Gaza. Hamas, which earlier said Deif survived the blast, did not immediately comment.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "all parties" in the Middle East must avoid escalatory actions that could plunge the region into further conflict. Speaking Thursday in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar, Blinken appealed for countries to "make the right choices in the days ahead" and said a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza was the only way to begin to break the current cycle of violence and suffering. Blinken did not mention Israel, Iran or Hamas by name in his comments. □



In this photo released by an official website of the office of the Iranian supreme leader, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, center, leads a prayer over the coffins of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his bodyguard who were killed in an assassination blamed on Israel on Wednesday, during their funeral ceremony at the Tehran University campus, in Tehran, Iran, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian prays at center right.

Associated Press

lis. Addressing Israelis who celebrated the two killings, he said, "Laugh a bit and you will cry a lot."

But as he often does, Nasrallah kept his comments vague, vowing a "very-well studied retaliation" without saying what form it would take. He said only that Israel "will have to wait for the anger of the region's honorable people."

"The enemy and the one who is behind the enemy" an apparent reference to Israel's chief ally, the United States "will have to wait for our coming response," he said.

International officials have been scrambling to avert a cycle of retaliation before it spirals into a greater war. Since the Gaza war began in October, Hezbollah and Israel have traded fire almost daily across the border in exchanges that have caused deaths and the evacuation of tens of thousands from their homes. But they have also stayed within limits.

Several times, strikes that appeared to cross red lines raised fears of an acceleration into full-fledged

sure not to draw Lebanon into a repeat of the militant group's 2006 war with Israel, which wreaked heavy death and destruction in the country.

Israel and Iran risked plunging into war earlier this year when Israel hit Iran's embassy in Damascus in April. Iran retaliated, and Israel countered in an unprecedented exchange of strikes on each other's soil, but international efforts succeeded in containing that cycle before it spun out of control.

In Beirut's southern suburbs, the biggest Shiite district in the capital, hundreds of black-clad mourners packed the auditorium, many of them holding Hezbollah flags or photos of Shukur. An escort of red-capped fighters carried Shukur's coffin, also draped in a Hezbollah flag, down the aisle to the backing of a military band.

In his speech, Nasrallah praised Shukur as a veteran commander and denied that Hezbollah carried out the deadly strike on the soccer field in the mainly Druze town of Majdal

we strike, even if it's a mistake. If we made a mistake, we would admit and apologize," he said, adding, "The enemy made itself the judge, jury, and executioner without any evidence."

An unusual relative calm prevailed Thursday on the Lebanon-Israel border. Hezbollah claimed no rocket launches into Israel during the day.

The Lebanese state news agency said a strike hit the house of a Syrian family in a southern Lebanese town, killing at least four people and wounding several others.

Nasrallah said Hezbollah's fighters would also return to military operations Friday, ending the period of mourning for Shukur, but that the renewed strikes would be unrelated to the retaliation for his killing.

Earlier Thursday in Tehran, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei prayed over Haniyeh's coffin in a ceremony at Tehran University, with the new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, next to him. State television later showed the coffin placed in a truck

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Diplomatic efforts are underway to persuade Maduro to release Venezuela election vote tallies

By **GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA**
and **E. EDUARDO CASTILLO**
Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Diplomatic efforts are underway to persuade President Nicolás Maduro to release vote tallies from Venezuela's presidential election, after opposition leaders disputed his claim of victory and amid increasing calls for an independent review of the results, according to officials from Brazil and México.

Government officials from Brazil, Colombia and Mexico have been in constant communication with Maduro's administration to convince him that he must show the vote tally sheets from Sunday's election and allow impartial verification, a Brazilian government official told The Associated Press Thursday.

The officials have told Venezuela's government that showing the data is the only way to dispel any doubt in the results, said the Brazilian official, who asked not be identified because they are not authorized to publicly speak about the diplomatic efforts.

A Mexican official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the three governments



Demonstrators hold a Venezuelan flag outside that nation's consulate to protest the contested presidential election results in Bogotá, Colombia, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024.

have been discussing the issue with Venezuela but did not provide details. Earlier, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he planned to speak with President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and President Gustavo Petro of Colombia, and that his government believes it's important that the electoral tallies be made public.

On Wednesday, Maduro asked Venezuela's highest court to conduct an

audit of the election, but that request drew almost immediate criticism from foreign observers who said the court is too close to the government to produce an independent review.

It wasn't clear if Maduro's first concession to demands for more transparency was the result of the discussions with Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. Venezuela's president confirmed during a news conference on Wednesday that he had

spoken with Petro about it. Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice is closely aligned with Maduro's government. The court's justices are proposed by federal officials and ratified by the National Assembly, which is dominated by Maduro sympathizers.

Maduro's main challenger, Edmundo González, and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado say they obtained more than two-thirds of the tally sheets

that each electronic voting machine printed after polls closed. They said the release of the data on those tallies would prove Maduro lost.

Asked why electoral authorities have not released detailed vote counts, Maduro said the National Electoral Council has come under attack, including cyber-attacks, without elaborating.

The presidents of Colombia and Brazil both close allies of the Venezuelan government have urged Maduro to release detailed vote counts.

The Brazilian official said the diplomatic efforts are only intended to promote dialogue among Venezuelan stakeholders to negotiate a solution to the disputed election. The official said this would include the release of voting data and allowing independent verification. López Obrador said Mexico hopes the will of Venezuela's people will be respected and that there's no violence. He added that Mexico expects "that the evidence, the electoral results records, be presented."

Pressure has been building on the president since the election. □

Associated Press

Pakistan's cultural capital sees record rainfall, flooding streets and affecting daily life

By **BABAR DOGAR**
Associated Press

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's cultural city of La-

hore saw record-high rainfall early Thursday, leaving at least three people dead, while flooding streets, dis-



Motorcyclists drive through a flooded road caused by heavy monsoon rainfall in Lahore, Pakistan, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024.

Associated Press

rupting traffic and affecting daily life, officials said, as the death toll from rain-related incidents over the past month surpassed 100. In July, 99 people died in rain-related incidents and most of the deaths were reported in eastern Punjab and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, the National Disaster Management Authority said.

The latest spell of downpours started before dawn and is expected to continue for a week at intervals, according to the NDMA. In an advisory, it said the rains are likely to cause flash flooding and landslides.

The monsoon rains also lashed Pakistan's capital,

Islamabad, and other areas.

The latest spell of rains in Lahore was so heavy that it quickly flooded many streets and rainwater entered some wards in the Jinnah and Services hospitals in the capital of Punjab province, causing problems for patients undergoing treatment there.

At least one person died after being electrocuted in the Nishat Colony neighborhood. A 14-year-old boy drowned in a flooded street and a 5-year-old girl died after falling from the roof of her house, police said.

Some areas in the city received a record-high 353

millimeters (14 inches) of rainfall in a few hours, breaking a 44-year-old record in Lahore, according to the water and sanitation agency. In a statement, it said efforts were underway to pump rainwater off of main roads. Drainage systems quickly became overwhelmed after the rains, flooding several residential areas, officials said. The rainwater entered scores of homes in various parts of the city, residents said.

Monsoon rains have returned to Pakistan as the country is still struggling to recover from devastating 2022 floods that affected 33 million people and killed 1,739. □

Did you know about...?

The history and meaning of the Aruban florin

(Oranjestad)—Aruba Today is proud to officially introduce a new segment called Did you know about...?, where we dive into some (historical) facts of Aruba, its culture and way of living. In this first edition, we look back at the Aruban florin: its history, design and symbolism.

In Aruba, we know the 5, 10, 25 and 50 cent coins, along with the 1 and 5 Florin coin. Aruban Florin bills include the 10, 25, 50, 100, and rarely, the 200 bills. In Papiamentu we call our currency Florin, but the umbrella term for money is placa. Cents are called cen (pronounced: seng), both in the singular and plural form. Most coins are circular and their size depend on their worth. However, the 50 cent coin is easily recognizable by their square shape, as is the 5 Florin coin by their golden color. Every coin has the Aruban emblem carved on it, with the other side displaying the worth of the coin. The bigger 1 and 5 florin coins, however, contain the carving of the emblem on one side, while displaying the side profile of the Dutch king, Willem-Alexander, on the other side. When his mother, Princess Beatrix, was reigning queen, it was her profile that was carved on the two coins.

Outdated Aruban coins and their names

In the past, Aruban coins had distinctive names and also varied in worth. For example, a 5-cent coin was once called Dos placa; 10-cent coins were called debchi; 25-cent coins were called diez placa and the 50-cent coin was once called Yotin (pronounced: jo-teen). We also used a distinctive coins worth 2 ½ cents, called placa too. However, this last coin is no longer in use and has become a relic of Aruban money. Back then, the 5-Florin coin used to also be square, but now it is circular.

Aruban bills: their design and symbolism

The Aruban Florin collection contains a variation of colorful bills, displaying incredibly detailed and beautiful designs that tell the story of Aruba on a single piece of paper.

Prior to 2019, the Aruban Florin bills were relatively simpler in design compared to now, but still included beautiful designs and colors, often depicting local animals. These past designs were made by the Aruban



artist Everino Fingal in 1990 up to 2019. Between 1990 and 1993, the 5 Florin coin was a bill. The Fingal designs also included a 500-Florin bill, which has now been discontinued.

In 2019, the Central Bank of Aruba commissioned a new design of the Aruba Florin bills, this time selecting artist and former art teacher, Nigel Matthew, to present his new design. Matthew kept the tradition of including local animals and the familiar colors on the bills. However, he included additional designs that represent the Aruban culture and link to the Indigenous inhabitants that were the first to set foot on the island.

Current design and symbolism 10 florin

On the 10-florin bill, you can see a Turtuga blanco (white turtle). The blue color symbolizes the blue Caribbean Sea. You can also see the ruins of the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins, a coral motif, and the symbols of Cas Floria (traditional Aruban house design) with a piece of mosaic.

25 florin

On this orange bill, you can see an Aruban medicinal plant called Shoshoro. The birds Trupiaal, Shoco, rock drawings, and the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic are also depicted. There is also

a Purun di ceramica (clay pot), in reference to the relics left behind by our indigenous ancestors.

50 florin

On this bill, we see the Cododo (blue lizard found on the ABC islands), Cangreu di tera (land crab), Willem III Tower, and again the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, as well as a beach plant called Banana di rif. The colors are pink/purple.

100 florin

This bill is green in color, representing nature. Here we see the Yuwana (Iguana), Aloe, Toteki (lizard), the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, and a dance group performing the Baile di cinta (folkloric dance with silk ribbons).

200 florin


There is another bill with a value of 200 dollars. The brown color symbolizes the earth of Aruba. Here we see the Dornasol and the Warawara—both local birds, along with the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, the Tuna cactus plant, and the Caha di orgel (folkloric instrument, used for many traditional songs).

Extra fact:

the word “florin” supposedly is named after the Italian city of Florence or it's a reference to the Italian word “florino”, both explanations related to historical Italian currencies.□

Source: Placa, placa, placa by the National Library of Aruba






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Visit the natural bridges of Aruba!

(Oranjestad)—After you've visited the Alto Vista Church, the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and the mini natural pool that is located right next to it, you're next up around the northern coast line must be the Natural Bridge. Once the largest natural bridge in the Caribbean, this bridge has

been a tourist attraction for many years.

The bridge was formed during thousands of years, cut and crafted by the wild waves that crash into the coral stone walls of the coast. Before its collapse, this bridge measured 30

meters in length and 7 meters in height, making it the biggest natural bridge in the Caribbean at the time. For many years, this site was also a frequently visited beach, as the bridge had a small opening through which the water would flow into the tiny beach.



Unfortunately in 2005, the bridge collapsed, and the little beach dried up. Despite this, this site remained a tourist attraction, with many visitors walking along the coral cliffs of the bridge to see the spectacular view of the northern coastline and the Caribbean Sea. Visitors can also still visit the souvenir shop on the left of the bridge entrance.

While the natural bridge no



longer is functional, there is now a smaller natural bridge very close. This bridge is often

called the "Baby Bridge" or "Daughter Bridge". □

Birds of Aruba

ORANJESTAD — On May 11th, 2010, the Aruba Bird-life Conservation was founded with the aim of protecting the biodiversity in general and birds in and around Aruba in particular.

Among other things, the foundation will focus on increasing the survival chances of species of wild birds by promoting their preservation and conservation. The foundation publishes the most beautiful pictures of local birds on their social media that show us the beauty of Aruba's birds and nature



in general. Aruba Today gives you a little peek with the following pictures and descriptions from the foundations Facebook page.

The Great Egret

Serenity in Aruba's National Park, a Great Egret flying in peace. When it is peaceful and quite, beautiful things start happening in nature.



Canadian in the house

The breeding season is over and it's getting pretty cold in North America. Shore birds have started moving southwards as early as July. This wetland beauty wants to keep its toes warm. Our Canadian friends know exactly where they can do so best. A Greater Yellowlegs



rediscovering Aruba's Bubali Wetlands.

Cabochon

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chi inspecting the human who just entered his territory.

English: Blue-tailed Emerald (male) Dutch: Blauwstaartsmaragdkolibrie (manetje).

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(Oranjestad)—The Kibrahacha is a famous tree known locally for its bright, yellow flowers that blooms for just three days. Scientifically known as *Tabebuia billbergii*, and in English as the Yellow Poui, this tree is native to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, and is considered among locals as one of the most spectacular trees on the island. But did you also know that the beautiful yellow flowers have a story behind them?

The legend of the Kibrahacha tree

The Kibrahacha is said to have extremely hard wood—so hard that it can break an axe. In fact, that's what its name means in Papiamentu: "kibra" (break) "hacha" (axe). The flowers bloom around April and May, but this only last for about three days, as the flowers start to fall off and the tree starts growing its green leaves. The Kibrahacha is especially particular, as it's the only one among its neighboring trees to start blooming first.

The legend of the Kibrahacha

Written by Hubert (Lio Booi)

One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock, suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudaweche, who was a epistemophile, to come see his father.

Aterima wasted to time and went to go fetch Kudaweche. Upon telling

Kudaweche that her father was sick, he immediately accompanied Aretima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aretima that the only thing that can cure her father is a home-made potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudaweche was determined to bring back Aretima's father back to health, and so off they went to the nearest Kibrahacha tree.

When they arrived at the tree, they saw that it was covered head to toe in thorns, with only a few closed flowers at the very top. Kudaweche, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aretima to start plucking the thorns of the tree to climb to the top where the flowers are. Aretima, just as determined to save her father, didn't hesitate to start.

To her surprise, every time she plucked a thorn of the tree, a bright,

yellow flower bloomed in its place. The thorns were hard to pluck out, but Aretima continued plucking with enthusiasm and wonder at the unfolding sight before her. Not too long after she was able to fill her entire satchel with the yellow flowers. Kudaweche, satisfied to see Aretima so happy and encouraged to help her father, took her back to her hut.

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aretima's mother quickly made a tea out of the flowers and gave it to her sick husband. Miraculously, after just one sip of the tea, the father's fever left his body immediately, and he opened eyes and sprung up feeling new.

The next morning, they all visited the same Kibrahacha tree that saved the life of Aretima's father and they saw another miracle. The tree was covered again in the same bright, yellow flowers, with not a thorn in sight. And as the legend goes, from that day on, the Kibrahacha tree no longer produced any more thorns. □

Aruba to me

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Snakes you may encounter on Aruba



(Oranjestad)—If you have ever or will ever go off-roading on the island, you may encounter three types of snakes that are dominant on the island. The Cascabel, Santanero and Boa differ from each other in a couple ways, and local perspective on each one may help you understand what you need to do if you ever were to encounter one during your touring session on the island.

Cascabel (*Crotalus unicolor*)

The small Cascabel or Aruba Island Rattlesnake averages 70 cm in length. The body color is often uniform gray or light brown. There may be a faint pattern of diamond shaped markings on the back. This pattern is most noticeable on younger snakes. The most distinctive feature of this snake is the rattle at the end of its tail which makes a buzzing sound when the snake is alarmed. Cascabels are shy and not aggressive, but their venom can be dangerous to humans. In fact, it's the only venomous snake native to the island. It is best to leave this snake alone. Do not attempt to catch or kill it, as it could not only be dangerous, but this snake is also endemic to the island, and its preservation has become a legal mandate for all residents and visitors.

Cascabels hunt by waiting under bushes and fruiting trees to catch passing lizards, mice, rats, small rabbits, and an occasional bird. This is often considered to be one of the rarest rattlesnakes in the world. The range of the Cascabel is restricted to the rugged and mountainous areas of the island mostly within Arikok National Park. The Arikok National Park was designated in the early 1980s to include most of the rattlesnake's population, providing a safe refuge in which the snake can be protected and monitored. The government has also implemented outreach and education initiatives to change local perception of the snake and highlight its ecological and economic importance – it is now being promoted as a national symbol. Arikok's partnership with the Toledo zoo has safeguarded the rattlesnake ex-situ and led to a number of research projects collecting critical data on the Cascabel's abundance, life history and habitat requirement to help guide future conservation efforts.

Santanero

The slender Santanero or Aruban Cat-eyed Snake is a small fella, typically less than 50 cm long. This snake is recognizable by the large



scales on the top of its head and by its pattern of dark brown bands alternating with light brown bands. The belly is plain white or cream colored without any markings. Native as well to the island, this snake is shy and not aggressive. However, it has enlarged teeth at the back of its mouth and mild venom which is not dangerous to humans, but can paralyze small lizards and frogs. Santaneros are most active at night when they search for food. During the day, they hide under rocks or leaves. They frequently climb trees and cactus. Santaneros eat toads, frogs, insects, and lizards. You may find Santaneros near dams during periods of rainy weather or crossing roads at night. This snake is found island wide. A Santanero in your garden will keep away the unwanted insects. If you encounter a Santanero around your garden, please do not harm this species.

Boa (*Boa constrictor*)

Boas are Aruba's largest snakes. The longest Boa found on the island was slightly less than 3 m. Newborn Boas average 35 cm. Boas are not venomous but are what is called constrictor snakes; they kill by wrapping themselves around a prey and suffocating them. The most distinctive feature of a Boa is its pattern of dark brown and tan blotches which become red toward the tail. The belly is white or cream colored with numerous black spots. Boas are excellent climbers and may be found in trees and cactus. Boas also hide in the leaves under bushes waiting to catch prey that pass. Boas catch their prey with their teeth and then constrict it in their coils. The Boa's diet consists of birds, lizards, rats, mice, and rabbits. Large Boas have been known to eat small goats and chickens. When threatened, Boas will hiss loudly.

Boas are a non-native species and are invasive to the island, risking the population of native lizards and birds. The first Boas were reported on the island in 1999. Since that time they have been found across the entire island in all types of habitats. If you ever encounter a Boa, please do not approach it. Instead, please call the Arikok National Park, as they are experienced in handling Boas. □



A brief history of the California Light House



(Oranjestad)—At the furthest western point of the island, there lies the tallest structure on the island: The California Light House. Standing on top of a limestone cliff, this lighthouse oversees the entire island, offering one of few best views of the island and the surrounding sea. It is also one of the few monuments that hold a rich history.

The lighthouse was constructed in between 1914-1916, and its first keeper was a young trained lighthouse keeper from Curacao names Jacob Jacobs. Mr. Frederico Fingal was the last man to have occupied this position until 1962. Though his son, Mr. Romulo Fingal did not continue in his father's footsteps, he does have a special connection to the lighthouse. He sat down with our reporter and shared a bit of its history.

As Mr. Fingal explains, "In 1915, cargo donkeys were hired from Figaroa di Noord to help build the Lighthouse at Westpunt. The donkeys had to walk along the beach all the way to Westpunt carrying the cargo, poles, cement, and all these things. At that time, it was a difficult task until Aruba got its first truck. These things reflect how people could have accomplished this tremendous job with so little." Mr. Fingal said, "At that time, it wasn't a place for people to work.



It was very challenging because it was full of goats and donkeys, and it was very isolated. There were no hotels or roads to get there. There was only a donkey trail. Those were the only means of transportation."

Mr. Fingal continues, "In 1939, I was born in the lighthouse, and my father was the last lighthouse keeper until he retired in 1962. After that, they removed the power cables all the way to the top. According to the story, we couldn't have the light ourselves because they dismantled it, and after many years, I heard that it is in a train museum in San Nicolas, where we found this very special lens that, when the light shines through it, it reaches 30 kilometers out to sea." Mr. Fingal told our reporter.

The lighthouse has a long and very interesting history. The reason why the lighthouse was built, according

to Mr. Fingal, dates back to the day when the cargo ship S.S. California sank because of the lack of light. In 1913, Aruba made a request to Curacao to build a Lighthouse at Westpunt, and the governor of Curacao responded to Aruba to come back in 1915 with a well-detailed plan. "During the First World War from 1914 to 1918, they had to wait for the light to be transported to Aruba because it was manufactured in France. At that time, there was no electricity, and the light was very interesting because it rotated with a kerosene lamp that planes used; clean kerosene," Mr. Fingal said.

Mr. Fingal discovered something very interesting about the lighthouse after much research was documented in his book 'History of the Lighthouse at Westpunt.' He found many details: "I found out that the height of the lighthouse was due to the absence of electricity. There was also the presence of coral. There is a long steel cable from where the light is, and under the light, at the highest point, there is a hanging weight, a sort of pendulum that swings like that, with a weight that measures about 1 meter by 30 centimeters wide, which is a block of solid iron attached to a cable. When you release it upwards, it comes down, and the weight that comes down

pulls it up, gradually. And while it comes down, the same weight that is descending causes many small wheels to turn in the opposite direction. The Lighthouse rotates from 6 pm in the evening, when the sun sets, until 6 am in the morning. During the entire night, the light shines on the lantern, it goes down 24 meters, and the Lighthouse is 30 meters high. It is designed not to collapse," Mr. Fingal explains.

Mr. Fingal further explains that in one night, the lighthouse rotates 4,320 times and consumes one gallon of kerosene for the whole operation. "At that time, the kerosene was supplied from the Lago refinery. Every day it was brought down, and to start the light again, they had to lift the weight up, so our job as children was to crank it and raise the weight back up in the evening when the light stuck, they would take it down again, and the light stayed down. That's how it worked for a very long time," Mr. Fingal explains.

Thanks to the Monument Fund Aruba, which worked hard and is currently in charge of the Lighthouse, Mr. Fingal is very happy with its preservation, along with all the renovations that have taken place. He hopes that the story of the lighthouse will continue to live on for future generations. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 School subject
5 Job for Sherlock
9 Inklings
11 Full of energy
13 Nick of films
14 Did shoe work
15 Smelter supply
16 Stoolie's act
18 Backslide
20 Semi-circular shape
21 Toped
22 Cacao holders
23 Orang-utan, e.g.
24 Writer Jonson
25 Workout count
27 Urbane
29 Tough wood
30 Pens
32 Fish groups
34 Track trip
35 Skating category
36 Sly's "Rocky" co-star

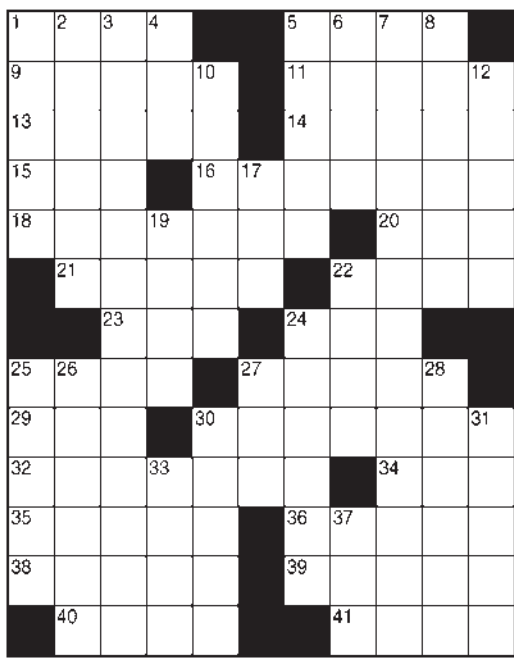
- 38 Paint-spilling sound
39 Bouquet
40 Pipe bends
41 Peepers

DOWN

- 1 Un-important
2 Put on a pedestal
3 San Francisco site
4 Bowler, e.g.
5 Play groups
6 Heaps
7 Tech region near San Francisco
8 Made flat
10 Peaceful
12 Periphery
17 Invite
19 Emulates Drake
22 Dessert fruit
24 Pops
25 Grating sounds
26 Get away
27 Musical note
28 Pal of Jerry and George
30 Sells for
31 Petty quarrels
33 Test type
37 Star pitcher



Yesterday's answer



5-10

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-10

CRYPTOQUOTE

CZMHZKZ HB GEJDRZMP. TBEO
USNU USZDZ HR REAZUSHBX
HBRHQZ GEJ USNU HR
XDZNUZD USNB NBG
ECRUNIMZ. — ISDH RUHNB Q.
MNDREB

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: LOVE IS COMPOSED OF A SINGLE SOUL INHABITING TWO BODIES. — ARISTOTLE

Cruise ship Schedule: August 6 - 27 2024

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	06	ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS CARNIVAL HORIZON CARNIVAL MARDI GRAS	08.00 09.00 13.00	20.00 22.00 23.00	B C I	1 1 1
WED	07	RHAPSODY OF THE SEAS	09.00	21.00	C	1
TUE	13	CELEBRITY BEYOND CARNIVAL CELEBRATION CARNIVAL VISTA	08.00 08.00 13.00	21.00 22.00 23.00	B C I	1 1 1
THU	14	ENCHANTED PRINCESS	08.00	18.00	C	1
WED	20	CARNIVAL HORIZON	09.00	22.00	C	1
WED	27	CELEBRITY BEYOND	08.00	21.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Electrical power



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of out-

Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Supermarket hours



Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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24/7

Former Michigan State football coach Mel Tucker sues university over his firing

By RICK CALLAHAN
Associated Press

Former Michigan State University head football coach Mel Tucker is suing the university and school leaders, alleging that they wrongfully fired him last year and violated his constitutional rights after he was accused of sexual harassment.

The federal lawsuit filed Wednesday in Michigan accuses school officials of undertaking an "improper, sham investigation" of allegations that Tucker sexually harassed and exploited rape survivor and activist Brenda Tracy.

The suit, which seeks unspecified damages, alleges that Michigan State officials violated his rights to due process and equal protection as well as his employment agreement with the school. □

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In 'The Instigators,' a heist goes terrifically wrong

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

Though depression lurks around the edges of "The Instigators," Doug Liman's heist movie is a loosely amiable return to South Boston for Matt Damon and Casey Affleck, who also co-wrote the film.

In the film's opening moments, Rory (Damon), a former Marine, tells his therapist, Dr. Rivera (Hong Chau), that after a lifetime of screw ups and disappointments, he's not so much forlorn as simply ready to "cash in" his ticket. His phrase is a telling one for a film where midlife disappointments and a ramshackle heist-gone-wrong plot collide in farcical ways. As a last-ditch effort and to raise \$32,480 for his child support payments, Rory signs up with a criminal band of misfits to steal election-night payouts to a corrupt Boston mayor (Ron Perlman) running for reelection.

Therapists have made their ways into crime dramas like "The Sopranos," but "The Instigators" (in theaters Thursday, on Apple TV+ Aug. 9) adds a novel wrinkle by bringing Dr. Rivera along for the ride. When Rory and Cobby (Affleck) go on the run, she tags along as a hostage by



This image released by Apple TV shows Matt Damon, left, and Casey Affleck in a scene from "The Instigators."

Associated Press

choice.

But it takes a little time for the buddy comedy to develop. First, "The Instigators" works in a large percentage of today's top character actors among them Michael Stuhlbarg, Alfred Molina, Ving Rhames, Toby Jones and Paul Walter Hauser all of whom raise the bar in this rudderless but winningly shaggy action comedy.

Liman, the director of "Go," "The Bourne Identity" and

the recent "Road House," has always had a knack for freewheeling ensembles and for getting the most out of his stars' charisma. "The Instigators" may be a modern streaming movie but it's a decidedly old-school kind of caper, stock full of local color and peopled with faces you're happy to see. It's a product of Damon and Ben Affleck's Artists Equity, which produced the film from the script by Casey Affleck and

"City on the Hill" creator Chuck MacLean.

For them, the blue-collar Boston terrain of "The Instigators" is about as cozy as bleacher seat in Fenway Park. "The Instigators" doesn't live up to other Damon-Afflecks Beantown-set movies ("Good Will Hunting," "Gone Baby Gone," "The Town"), and some of their Dunkin' Donuts-adjacent schtick is at least approaching stale. You could call it a homecoming but it's

more like they never left.

So, yes, this is them very much in their element, but that goes especially true for Affleck, the main reason to see "The Instigators." His Cobby is a drunk and convict who enlists in the heist out of a lack of other options. It's an ill-considered scheme by a pair of small-time gangsters (Stuhlbarg, Molina), one of whom runs a bakery as a front. They dispatch a trigger-happy small-time crook (Jack Harlow) to lead the mission, a debacle from the get go. Nothing goes right, not even the expected election result, and out of the melee clatter Cobby and Rory, with a special police investigator (Rhames) in steadfast pursuit. On the run, their double act Damon's earnest deadpan, Affleck's smart-aleck flippancy works as well as it ever has, even if the script could use a touch more wit.

Affleck makes up for it with his melancholic motormouth routine, one that gets an even better foil once Chau, the talented co-star of "The Whale" and "Showing Up," is roped into their escape. Though Liman knows how to mix action and comedy as well as anyone, "The Instigators" is better whenever there's less going on. □

Carrie Underwood will return to 'American Idol' as its newest judge

By **KAITLYN HUAMANI**
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Carrie Underwood will be the next singer to sit behind the judges' table on "American Idol," filling Katy Perry's spot after her departure

from the show in May.

Underwood, who rose to fame after she won the singing competition show in 2005, will return 20 years later as a judge for the upcoming season, set to premiere in spring 2025. She's

the first "American Idol" alum to become a judge. In an emotional video announcing Underwood's new hosting gig, she said "I'm proud of everything that I was able to accomplish on the show, and I'm so proud of everything that I've accomplished since." The country singer, who is the most decorated artist in CMT Music Awards' history with 25 wins, made waves with her rendition of Bonnie Raitt's "I Can't Make You Love Me" at her audition, and she quickly became a fan-favorite.

Underwood has also won eight Grammy Awards and consistently tops the charts with her albums and singles. She will be joining Luke Bryan and Lionel Richie, who each have seven seasons of judging experi-

ence under their belts, for the franchise's 23rd season. "This upcoming season marks 20 years since Carrie won America's hearts on 'Idol' and launched her successful multi-Grammy Award-winning career. As a former Idol and dynamic musical force, she brings a remarkably unique perspective to one of the most popular shows on television," said Craig Erwich, president of Disney Television Group, in a release from ABC. "This is a full-circle moment both for the show and audiences at home who have been tuning in for over two decades. Welcome home, Carrie."

Longtime host Ryan Seacrest, who has been with the show since it premiered, will also return.

Seacrest is also taking over Pat Sajak's role as the host of "Wheel of Fortune" this fall.

Auditions for the new season will kick off Aug. 12 with the "Idol Across America" nationwide search for talent and will end in September. The season is set to premiere in the spring and will be available to watch on ABC and Hulu.

"American Idol" premiered in 2002 on Fox and was a hit for the network, but it was canceled in 2016. After two years off the air, the show was revived by ABC and has aired there for seven seasons. Perry was the first of the revival judges to leave the judges' post.

A representative for Underwood did not immediately return requests for comment. □



Carrie Underwood appears the Songwriters Hall of Fame Induction and Awards Gala in New York, June 13, 2024.

Associated Press

Simone Biles edges Brazil's Rebeca Andrade for her second Olympic all-around gymnastics title

By WILL GRAVES
AP National Writer

PARIS (AP) — Simone Biles remains peerless. Even when she's not quite perfect.

The American gymnastics star edged Brazil's Rebeca Andrade during a tense Olympic all-around final Thursday. Biles' total of 59.131 was just over a point ahead of Andrade at 57.932, one of the closest calls Biles has ever endured at a major international event. Sunisa Lee, the Tokyo Olympics champion, earned bronze despite spending much of the last 15 months dealing with multiple kidney diseases that left her return to the Games very much in doubt.

Still, the meet ended just like all the ones Biles has started and finished over the last 11 years: with hugs and gold on the way.

And a silver goat chain along with a gold medal around the Greatest of All Time's neck.

"It is crazy that I am in the conversation of 'Greatest of all athletes' because I just still think, 'I'm Simone Biles from Spring, Texas who loves to flip,'" she said.

The margin was the smallest in a major international event since Biles captured the third of her record six



Simone Biles, left, celebrates with teammate Suni Lee, of the United States, after winning the gold and bronze medals respectively in the women's artistic gymnastics all-around finals in Bercy Arena at the 2024 Summer Olympics, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024, in Paris, France.

Associated Press

world championships in 2015.

She was a teenager then. She's an icon now.

The 27-year-old who is redefining what a gymnast can do and just as notably, for how long she can do it became the third woman to become a two-time Olympic champion, joining Larisa Latynina of the Soviet Union in 1956 and 1960 and Vera Caslavskaya of Czechoslovakia in 1964 and 1968.

Biles also is the oldest woman to claim the biggest title in her sport since

then 30-year-old Maria Gorokhovskaya of the Soviet Union won the first-ever Olympic all-around in Melbourne in 1952.

Yet the sixth gold and ninth overall medal the same as Romanian great Nadia Comaneci, who was among the star-studded crowd that included the U.S. men's basketball team of Biles' unparalleled career did not come as easy as so many that came before.

She misjudged a transition on uneven bars, the weakest of her four events, let-

ting go of the upper bar too soon and forcing her to reach for a larger-than-expect gap.

While she didn't fall Biles muscled her way back into the routine it blunted her momentum and led to major deductions that left her trailing Andrade through two rotations.

The deficit didn't last.

Biles responded with a largely wobble-free 14.566 on the balance beam, the highest of the night among the 24 finalists, while Andrade was forced to do a

major balance check during her slightly easier set that dropped her down to second heading into floor exercise, Biles' signature event.

Andrade, the silver medalist behind Lee in 2021, needed the best floor set of her life to catch Biles. It didn't quite happen. Andrade stepped out of bounds at one point, a minor problem but enough to create plenty of wiggle room for Biles.

"I don't want to compete with Rebeca no more," Biles said. "I'm tired. Like, she's way too close. I've never had an athlete that close."

Biles incorporated music from pop icons Taylor Swift and Beyonce into her current routine, a 75-second set that began with the opening bars of Swift's hit "Ready For It?" and featured the hardest tumbling done by a woman in the history of the sport.

When she was done sealing gold that served as a redemption of sorts three years after pulling out of multiple finals in Tokyo to focus on her mental health Biles sprinted to hug Lee just off the podium and blew kisses to the cameras that have become fixtures wherever she goes under the Olympic rings. □

World Series could extend into November for 4th straight year

NEW YORK (AP) — The World Series could extend into November for the fourth straight year and will start on a Friday for the third consecutive time.

AL Division Series will have an extra scheduled off day between Games 1 and 2, a format that allows a team to have the same pitchers start Games 1 and 4, and Games 2 and 5 on normal four days' rest. Last year, NL Division Series had the extra off day.

Major League Baseball said Thursday the Series will start on Oct. 25, putting a possible seventh game on Nov. 2. The Series went into

November for the first time in 2001, when the 9/11 terrorist attacks caused the regular season to end a week later than originally scheduled. The latest a Series game has been played was Nov. 5, when Houston beat Philadelphia in Game 6 in 2022.

Before 2022, the World Series had not started on a Friday since 1915.

All four best-of-three Wild Card Series are scheduled for consecutive days from Oct. 1-3.

Twelve teams make the playoffs under the format that began in 2022. The top two teams in each league

get first-round byes, while the No. 3 seed faces No. 6 and No. 4 plays No. 5. The higher seed will be home in each best-of-three series.

In the best-of-five Division Series, the top seed plays the 3-vs.-6 winner and the No. 2 seed plays the 4-vs.-5 winner. The Division Series will have the familiar format of the higher seed home for Games 1 and 2, and, if necessary, Game 5.

AL Division Series start on Oct. 5, have an off day followed by a game on Oct. 7, then switch to the other cities on Oct. 9-10. After another travel day, Game 5s would be played Oct. 12.



Texas Rangers manager Bruce Bochy watches from the dugout during the eighth inning of a baseball game against the Baltimore Orioles, Saturday, July 20, 2024, in Arlington, Texas.

Associated Press

NL Division Series also will start Oct. 5-6 followed by travel day and switch to the other sites for games on Oct. 8-9. Game 5s would be Oct. 11.

The NL Championship Series starts Oct. 13 and the AL Championship Series the following day, with off days after Game 2s and Game 5s. □



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The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba encourages Responsible Gaming.

Remember the ice bucket challenge? 10 years later, the viral campaign is again fundraising for ALS

By **MICHAEL CASEY**
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Dozens of people, including the Massachusetts governor and several sports stars, dumped cold water on themselves at Fenway Park Thursday to mark the 10th anniversary of the ALS ice bucket challenge.

The event is part of an effort to renew interest in the viral social media campaign that has raised money to find a cure for Lou Gehrig's disease.

Organizers said the campaign has raised \$250 million thus far and led to an additional \$1 billion in research funding.

"Our son's life was one of grace, determination and purpose, that through his resilience, diligence and courage, he created a movement that is still being celebrated today for all those that have been affected by this horrific dis-



Participants in a ceremony on the 10th anniversary of the Ice Bucket Challenge, from left, Boston Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy, Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey, John Frates, former Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan and former Boston Bruins' Ray Borque pour water over their heads at Fenway Park, Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024, in Boston.

Associated Press

ease," said Nancy Frates, the mother of Pete Frates, who helped popularize the challenge along with

Pat Quinn. Both were diagnosed with ALS and have since died.

"Even though his human

body is no longer with us, his powerful spirit is still being celebrated along with the historic movement,"

she said. "You brought results. But as Pete would say, 'We can have fun today but the job isn't done. Let's get back to work tomorrow.'"

Dr. Merit Cudkowicz, the director of the Sean M. Healey & AMG Center for ALS at Mass General Hospital who was also Pete Frates' doctor, recalled her first meeting with him and how he vowed to raise \$1 billion for ALS research. Among the benefits there have been more drugs to treat the disease.

"It's hard to believe that dumping a bucket of ice over your head was going to change how we think about ALS, but that simple act did more to raise awareness for ALS than any other effort, and it catalyzed amazing research advances," she told the crowd of several hundred including ALS patients and their families. □